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SUBJECT: MIXED RESULTS IN CHILE'S MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

REF: A. SANTIAGO 954

[1](#)B. SANTIAGO 950

[1](#)C. SANTIAGO 581

[1](#)1. Summary: On Sunday October 26, voters across Chile headed to the polls to elect mayors and city council members. This election - widely viewed as a referendum on the national political mood - delivered mixed results. The conservative Alianza coalition won a majority of mayoral votes for the first time since 1990 while the Concertacion coalition maintained its hold on the majority of city council seats. End summary.

Mayoral Race: Big Win for Alianza

[1](#)2. Opposition coalition Alianza has reason to celebrate after winning the majority of mayoral votes, the first time since the return of democracy in 1990 that it defeated Concertacion in any nationwide election. Alianza earned 40 percent of the total votes compared to Concertacion's 38 percent. Alianza's victory can be credited to the fact that they won mayoral seats in several of the most populous communes even though the Concertacion actually won more mayoral seats overall (Alianza: 139 versus Concertacion: 149). Today, 5.5 million Chileans are governed by an Alianza mayor and 9.6 million by a Concertacion mayor. When the recently elected mayors take office in December those numbers will shift to 7.9 million for Alianza and 7.4 million for Concertacion. Alianza has also increased its presence in several of the communes of the Metropolitan Region and in regional capitals. Most notably, in the commune of Santiago, Democratic Union Party (UDI) candidate Pablo Zalaquett handily defeated Jaime Ravinet (Christian Democrat) the former Minister of Housing and Defense and former mayor of Santiago (Ref A).

Concertacion's Strong Hold on City Council

[1](#)3. Concertacion strengthened its hold on city council votes throughout the country gaining 45 percent of the votes while Alianza managed 36 percent. Despite predictions from both sides that the gap would narrow by as much as fifty percent, Concertacion largely maintained its spread over Alianza, decreasing from 10 percent to 9 (Ref B). Analysts suggest that the vote spread in city council seats is a more important indicator of party strength than that in mayoral races because voters are less familiar with city council candidates and so are more likely to vote based on party affiliation.

[1](#)4. In terms of individual party performance the National Renewal Party (RN) comes out as the leader. Although the party gained only one point more than in the 2004 elections, the drop in votes for other parties, most notably the Christian Democratic Party (DC) and Democratic Union Party (UDI), left RN on top with 18 percent of city council votes. DC President Soledad Alvear blamed the defeat on the existence of independent candidates and the Concertacion's decision to run two lists for city council members (Ref C), which she claimed confused voters. (Comment: Alvear's analysis may be sour grapes. A majority of commentators believe the split lists actually helped

Concertacion. End comment.) The Socialist Party (PS), Radical Social Democrat Party (PRSD), and Communist Party (PC) were able to slightly increase their percentage of city council votes compared to the 2004 elections, while the Party for Democracy (PPD) maintained about the same as in 2004. In its electoral debut, the Independent Regionalist Party (PRI) led by former DC senator Adolfo Zaldívar earned 7.5 percent of the vote.

Implications for Presidential Elections

¶15. RN's overall triumph leaves Sebastian Pinera in a position to negotiate the possibility of being chosen as the Alianza coalition's sole candidate for President. However, the UDI's role in retaining seats in emblematic communes and winning new mayoral seats may convince the party to propose its own presidential candidate. The results bode ill for Alvear. Considered by the media to be the face of DC's failure, Alvear will have a difficult time justifying her presidential candidacy. Without much time to recover from the municipal elections disaster, she'll have to face Eduardo Frei in the internal DC primary scheduled for December 14.

President Bachelet's Words of Wisdom

¶16. On Sunday evening, once the mixed results for the Concertacion were revealed, President Bachelet took the podium at La Moneda palace. She encouraged the Concertacion to be self-critical and highlighted the need for unity, alluding to the two lists. Bachelet called for "renewal, to listen to the word on the streets, to hear the message and inject a new dynamism into its political activity".

Comment

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¶17. The mixed results of the municipal elections leave few clear winners and only one obvious loser - Soledad Alvear. In the coming days and weeks, both political alliances will try to spin the results to their own advantage while internally attempting to read the murky tea leaves. Post will provide further, more in depth analysis over the coming days. End comment.

SIMONS